

KOOL-AID DILLS

Kids are responsible for some of the best culinary inventions, like S'mores and PBJ sandwiches. (OK, maybe they didn't invent the PBJ, but they should have!) Now word comes via the *New York Times* of another kid culinary invention, this time down in the Mississippi Delta country in the Deep South. And while kids are still the primary consumers, this product is now being seen on store counters next to jars of local favorites such as pickled eggs and pickled pigs feet. While these delicacies have been spotted as far afield as Dallas and St. Louis, they are still most common among the African-American population in southern Mississippi and Louisiana, in the delta region of the mighty Mississippi River.

These are dill pickles. But instead of your traditional green dill pickles, these pickles have a rather striking color, somewhere between green and red, and they have a surprising sweet-sour taste. These are Kool-Aid Dills. You heard it right—Kool-Aid dill pickles. They first made an appearance in the early 1990s, and now they've even made the *New York Times*. Here's how you make them.

Take a large jar of dill pickles, and cut them in half and pour out the pickle brine. In the jar, make a batch of double-strength Kool-Aid, add a pound of sugar, shake well to dissolve, put the dill pickle halves back in the jar and let it all sit in the refrigerator for about a week. It doesn't really matter what flavor Kool-Aid you use, although the red flavors, like cherry, strawberry, or tropical fruit tend to be the most common. That's it.

No one makes Kool-Aid pickles commercially yet—they tend to be made by local neighborhood ladies or church groups. When asked about Kool-Aid pickles, a representative of Kraft Foods who makes Kool-Aid, regained her composure and said that Kraft always endorses consumers finding new and innovative ways to use Kraft products. Enterprising chefs are experimenting to find ways to improve the product, such as piercing the pickles with a fork for greater Kool-Aid absorption and combining different Kool-Aid flavors for maximum effect.

Actually, this isn't as strange as it sounds. The sweet-sour or sour-sweet combination is one that is found in most cuisines. Sweet pickles are not a contradiction in terms, but a common product on supermarket shelves. Sweet and sour pork is a staple dish in Cantonese restaurants. The Germans are particularly fond of the sweet-sour combination of flavors. Sauerbraten, a type of German pot roast, is flavored with vinegar or wine, and then the sauce is thickened with crushed ginger snaps. And Rotkohl, or German red cabbage, is a dish of cooked shredded red cabbage with the tartness of vinegar offset by the sweetness of chunks of fresh apples. And I remember my Dad telling me that 70 years ago now, when he was in high school in Georgia, kids would suck the juice of a lemon through hollow peppermint sticks.

Kool-Aid pickles are not yet made commercially, although one convenience store chain in the Mississippi Delta is seeking to register a trademark for Koolickles, the first commercially made Kool-Aid pickles. So there's still time for some enterprising teenage entrepreneur at Argonaut or Amador High school to introduce Amador County to the delights of Kool-Aid pickles. After all, look at the money that folks like Orville Redenbacher or Emeril Lagasse have made with their products. If Paul Newman can have his name on everything from salad dressing to popcorn, then your kid can do the same with Kool-Aid pickles. This is Steve Muni for the Hometown Kitchen.